

Obituary.

GEORGE MILLER BEARD, A.M., M.D., NEW YORK.

THE death of Dr. George Miller Beard was a surprise to all, and cannot fail to carry with it a sense of genuine sorrow to those who had the privilege of knowing him well. To the entire medical profession also his demise will cause a pang of keen regret. Both as neurologist and psychiatrist, Dr. Beard had already, at the time of his death, attained a high rank. His reputation, like his broad modes of thought, was cosmopolitan. His literary activity developed in two directions not often combined in the same person. He was both a popularizer of scientific knowledge and an original investigator. As popularizer, he wrote both for the medical and the lay public, and his writings found among both a large circle of readers. His style was logical, vivid, original, and always interesting. In this phase of his course he found many followers and few critics.

As an original investigator, his methods of study and of presenting his views were peculiarly his own, and by reason of their very originality they sometimes provoked a hostile criticism which, indeed, often proved to be the highest compliment that could be paid them. In this latter phase of literary activity he found few followers among those pursuing the ordinary scientific methods, and many critics. The reason of this lies in the nature of the subjects toward which he turned his attention. Naturally of a philosophical turn of mind, he pursued the study of hypnotism, clairvoyance, mind-reading, and certain allied topics. He was not a believer in the inductive philosophy pure and simple, but held rather that the highest human knowledge

was to be obtained by the deductive process. Following thus in his investigation a line of subjects where negation is simple, and often but a sign of ignorance, while demonstration and affirmation, in the nature of things, was infrequent and difficult of attainment, he laid himself open to criticism, born of the uncertainties of the ground over which he travelled. But this all will admit, that no man ever met criticism, whether in society, discussions, or in print, with greater good-humor. No opposition disturbed his perfect belief in the correctness of his own position; no captious remark ruffled his placidity. Indeed, in all his writings, in his conversation, and in his experiments, there was a kind of philosophical serenity that commanded respect and attracted men to him.

Dr. Beard was born in Montville, Conn., on May 8, 1839, was graduated from Yale College in 1862, and in 1866 from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. He at once began the practice of medicine in this city, making electro-therapeutics and nervous diseases a specialty. His first contribution to medical literature was a paper in 1866 upon "Electricity as a Tonic," and from that time forth he proved to be an indefatigable, earnest, and voluminous writer. The work by which he is most widely known to physicians is probably that upon "Medical and Surgical Electricity," published in 1875, in conjunction with Dr. A. D. Rockwell. Two methods of electrization were described in this work, to which were applied respectively the terms "central galvanization" and "general faradization," expressing in a terse and systematized manner what undoubtedly had been frequently practised but not specifically named. These terms, doubtless, will cling for a long time to the literature of medical electricity. The publication of this work gave a decided and scientific impetus to the electro-therapeutics of the day.

To the public Dr. Beard had early become known by his "Our Home Physician," published in 1869, and "Eating and Drinking" and "Stimulants and Narcotics," published in 1871.

Among his other contributions to medical literature may be

mentioned: "The Legal Responsibility in Old Age, Based on the Author's Researches into the Relations of Age to Work"; "Hay Fever, or Summer Catarrh"; "The Scientific Basis of Delusions, Being a New Theory of Trance and its Bearing on Human Testimony"; "Nervous Exhaustion"; "Sea-Sickness: its Symptoms, Nature and Treatment"; "American Nervousness, with its Causes and Consequences"; "Trance and Muscle-Reading"; "Psychology of the Salem Witchcraft Excitement of 1692, and its Practical Applications to Events of our own Time, Including the Cases of Guiteau and of Cadet Whittaker"; "Medical Education and the Medical Profession in Europe and America." His more important works have been translated into German, and have had a large circulation in different parts of Germany. Among the German writers who have contributed to the literature of general electrization, neurasthenia, and nervousness, endorsing and extending his views, are Benedict, Erb, Lowenfeld, Möbius, Engelhorn, Fischer, C. Gerhardt, Vater, Neisser, Leyden, Holst, Arndt, Burkart, Maienfisch, and Stein. Indeed, Dr. Beard himself was of opinion that his writings and researches had more influence in Germany than in any other country. He referred with pride to the part that he had taken in the growth of a new philosophy and literature of the nervous system.

He was also a frequent contributor to the *North American Review*, the *Popular Science Monthly* and the daily press. The simple enumeration of his various pamphlets and articles would make a long and creditable list, indicative of the industry of the man, of his versatility, and of his quick grasp of the latest phase of popular thought concerning this or that scientific subject. Dr. Beard was not the anchorite-*savant* buried in the contemplation of the field of a microscope, or intent on the gross pathology of a part. His intellect was of a more subtle type, and delighted in analyzing the mysteries of the human mind; nor in this was he a mere metaphysician, dallying with words; on the contrary, he brought to the task a wide range of physical tests. However, on the whole he seems to have been glad to let others make special

studies so long as he could be allowed to generalize on the basis of collected observations. His works relating to nervous exhaustion or neurasthenia are remarkable for the power of observation which they display, and for the logical manner in which these observations are brought forward to sustain his positions.

To Dr. Beard belongs the credit of demonstrating that the so-called mind-reading was in reality muscle-reading. He was, we believe, the first in this country to repeat the experiments of Hitzig and Ferrier on cerebral localization, and demonstrated them before the New York Society of Neurology and Electrology.

In his work on "A New Theory of Trance," published in 1877, taking up the subject where it was left by Braid and Czermak, he claims to have demonstrated these three points: First, that in order to introduce artificial or mesmeric trance (hypnotism), it was not needful to go through any passes, or fixing of the senses, or employ any special manœuvres whatsoever. Second, that this mesmeric trance (hypnotism) is but an artificial production of a state which is common to the race, as insanity is common to the race. Third, if we understand any one of the varieties of trance, we understand them all; for one law presides over all.

Much credit must also be given to Dr. Beard for systematizing the use of the bromides in sea-sickness, and bringing this very efficient treatment into general notice.

Among many other societies, Dr. Beard was a member of the American Neurological Association, of the National Association for the Protection of the Insane, and was one of the founders of the New York Society of Neurology and Electrology, subsequently merged into the New York Neurological Society.

He was a contributor to the pages of this JOURNAL. His last article, entitled "The Case of Guiteau: a Psychological Study," and published in our number of January, 1882, attracted much attention both at home and abroad, and was extensively quoted and referred to in the final summing up of Guiteau's case by European alienists.

He held that Guiteau was insane, and had been so for at least

twenty years. In referring back to this article, the reader will find in it pages written in Dr. Beard's best and most characteristic style, at once subtle, logical, concise, and well put.

But no further enumeration of Dr. Beard's public merits is needed; his work will long speak for itself.

His death was characteristic of the man. He was perfectly conscious that he was dying. Referring to a reception that was to have been given to him at Montreal, he said: "Instead of seeing me, they will read of my death in the newspapers."

To the doctors who were sent for in haste a few hours before his last moments, he said in words that all who know him will recognize as familiar: "You 're good fellows, but it 's no use doing any thing for me. My time has come."

And even while dying he was analyzing his sensations, and remarked: "Tell the doctors it is impossible for me to record the thoughts of a dying man. It would be interesting to do so, but I cannot. My time has come. I hope others will carry on my work."

He who had made a psychical analysis of many other minds recognized the peculiar state of his own, but could not summon the force to record the observations. The scientific spirit of investigation was strong in him even at the end; he wished to record his thoughts for the benefit of others. Yes, his time had come. The small band of neurologists has lost a friend and earnest co-worker; the world a man who, whatever his place may be in the final temple of fame, at least tried to do the world good, and certainly has had some share in the advance of a true understanding of psychological medicine.

"Vita enim mortuorum in memoriâ vivorum est posita."

[W. J. M.]